

是否存在过一种线性叙事？

——读成碎片化的传统叙事与读成线性化的碎裂的后殖民叙事

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摘要：本文的基本假设是叙事本身并非线性的或者碎裂的，线性与碎片性都是阐释的结果。读者若对一致性感兴趣，便倾向于在每一种叙述中找到线性，若是乐见对于碎裂的人类境况的表征，则几乎无法看到线性。这一假设可由四个例证论述。第一个例证是明显属于线性叙事的小说《三个火枪手》。细读其《序言》可知，该文本目的在于突显其虚构性，一直调用叙事聚焦，颠覆角色的身份，动摇年代顺序，对线性提出挑战。第二个例证则是匈牙利 1930 年代的冒险小说，从叙述时间处理的角度看，这种文类中通常会很简单，但该小说则不然。突兀的叙述只在读者的回想中才变成线性的，与主角那侦探似的故事创造者一样。因此，传统认为的线性叙述文类在后现代文学熏陶下的读者看来，有可能是碎裂的；这一点与此文例举的另外两部非常复杂老道的叙事恰成对照。这两部碎片化的后殖民叙事作品是拉什迪的《小丑沙利马》（2005 年）以及俄罗斯女作家乌利茨卡娅的《美狄亚和她的孩子们》（2005 年）。尽管这两部小说的碎片化和多视角叙事技巧令人惊叹，其基于时间发展而成的家族故事主线仍然显而易见。真正的线性叙事也许从未存在过，而甚至是极具艺术技巧的碎片化叙述依然可以读成线性的。

关键词：叙事 线性 碎片化 后殖民 视角

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Linear Narrative — Did It ever Exist?

Traditional Narratives Read as Fragmentary vs. Fractured Post – Colonial Ones Read as Linear

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Abstract: The ground hypothesis of this paper is that narratives are not *per se* linear or fractured; linearity and fragmentariness are interpretive achievements. Readers interested in the experience of coherence tend to find linearity in every narrative, while those who like the representation of a fractured human condition will hardly experience linearity anywhere. The hypothesis is tested through four examples. The first one could be regarded as the most obvious example of linear narratives *The Three Musketeers*. A careful reading of its “Introduction” suggests that this text tends to advertise its fictionality, continuously plays with the focalization, undermines the identity of the characters, destabilizes the chronology, and challenges linearity. The second example is a popular narrative, a Hungarian adventure novel from the 1930s, which should be really simple from the viewpoint of narrative management of time, but it is not. The abrupt narrative becomes linear in retrospection through the eye of a reader, and detective – like story – creating achievement of the main protagonists. The result that narratives traditionally described as linear may seem actually fractured to a reader schooled in post – modern literature is tested in the counterexamples of two highly sophisticated narratives, which are both fragmentary and post – colonial, Salman Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) and Ludmila Ulitskaya’s *Medea and Her Children* (1997). Despite all fragmentariness and fascinating multiperspective narrative techniques, it is not really difficult to see the main family stories in those novels evolving in time linearly. Really linear narratives might have never existed.

ted and even the highly artistic fractured narratives of contemporary literature can be read as linear.

Key words: narrative linearity fragmentariness post – colonial perspective

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Literary historians frequently work with taxonomies. Categories like romantic literature, modern fiction, or post – colonial narrative suggest that pieces of literature belonging to the same category have important common features. It is not enough that two pieces were written in the same historical period and in the same cultural context. In the middle of a well – described period a large proportion of the literary production can be described as backward or revolutionarily inventive, that is not conforming to the obligatory literary conventions of the period. The works themselves must be similar if they were written in the same period, but similarity depends on how we compare them. The hermeneutic circle may be a good concept to describe the elaboration of such taxonomic categories. If a set of important literary pieces (a canon) is defined for a category, a set of the common features can be abstracted; and if such a set of features is defined, one can decide whether a work belongs to the category or not. And a new selection, based on the distinctive features, will probably modify the general understanding of the category and, as a logical consequence, the set of distinctive features. Friedrich Schleiermacher, when he coined the phrase “hermeneutic circle”, did not speak of periods, but very much of other comprehensive categories, such as oeuvres of single authors and literary genres (Schleiermacher 1977, esp. 336).

So far so good. But: if the most important features of certain literary pieces are first defined and then given a central role in the definition of a category or the literariness of a period, one will tend to pay special attention to those features also when reading literature outside the category. This is especially true if the category is very important for us, if it is our own period or the most exciting kind of contemporary literature. However, it would be inappropriate to look for definitively post – modern features outside post – modern literature, if their central role depends on whether they correspond to some central features of the post – modern experience, or whatever came after post – modernism. Although the correspondence of a poetic technique and a more or less philosophical abstraction of human experience is theoretically rather problematic, a general impression of some connection seems to be felt. The distrust in grand narratives may be connected to the breakdown of linear narration, and the experience of afterness to post – modern techniques of quotation. Since reading is supposed to help readers to understand themselves, the emphasis on the post – modern poetic features, which are supposed to express the post – modern condition, results in a way of reading that is interested in finding and enjoying those very features. When such a reading habit has been developed, it would be a very hard and rather ascetic practice to read non – post – modern texts without focusing on the familiar and enjoyable features. Of course, there is a canon of older works that challenge such ascetic readings and therefore they are accepted as something similar to post – modernist narratives. *Tristram Shandy* has many features that cannot be related to post – modernism, but it is so much more rewarding to read it admiring the familiar features. In other works, however, the challenge to linearity is not so evident.

Of course, it could be possible to understand ourselves through the experience of the otherness of those texts, as if saying: “Oh these linear narratives, how different our age is!” But what if those narratives are not so linear themselves; if linearity was also the result of an interpretive practice, which was interested in finding

coherence and unity? It is very probable that the 19th century interpretations and theories that focused on the coherence of literary experience had a deep influence on the general image we have of 19th century novels. Recent and some not so recent analyses of Victorian multiplot novels (Garrett 1980) tend to challenge the ideas that their narration is linear, or the epistemological status of their narrators is always privileged. Where can we find the real traditional novels? Wolfgang Iser used a quotation by Umberto Eco to describe how readers create consistency (Iser 1994, 203),^① and this quotation seems to have become a standard description of the topic, used by many scholars.

It is only natural that life should be more like *Ulysses* than like *The Three Musketeers*, and yet we are all more inclined to think of it in terms of *The Three Musketeers* than in terms of *Ulysses* – or rather I can only remember and judge life if I think of it as a traditional novel. (Eco 1973, 202; quoted by Sproles 2005, 117)

Life is like *Ulysses*, but we cannot help thinking as if it was *The Three Musketeers*, which is the master example of traditional novels. I do not want to speak of the highly questionable status of life itself independent from experience, which problem might suggest that life previously could have been different (more coherent and linear), since it was experienced by different subjects, and therefore it could have been represented in different (linear) narratives. I do not do so because my point is that linearity was and still is the achievement of a reading. As James Kinkaid put it in the title of his seminal paper, texts are rather incoherent while readers tend to be coherent. It is worth noting, however, that Kinkaid did not speak of readers that gladly accept the experience of incoherence in a post – modern or post – post – modern age. And he spoke of highly sophisticated novels such as *Wuthering Heights*. Let us rather have a look at that most traditional of all traditional novels: that by Dumas père.

First of all, the novel contains an “Introduction”, in which a narrator tells a story of finding an unknown manuscript, and explicitly declares that the following text (i. e. the whole novel) is the print version of the first part of that manuscript, entitled “Mémoires de M. le comte de La Fère, concernant quelques – uns des événements qui se passèrent en France vers la fin du règne du roi Louis XIII et le commencement du règne du roi Louis XIV.”^② This first narrator of the introduction says that the only change he made was to the title. Instead of this long, old fashioned title he gave the text a new, more convenient one, and therefore he calls himself the godfather of the story. Count La Fère, as we learn from the story, is the original name of the character living by the alias Athos. So what we read in the book is said to be the narration of a character, which it obviously is not. Not only because the narrator speaks of Athos in the third person (Julius Caesar spoke of himself in third person too), or because he uses D’Artagnan as the main focalizer (e. g. when he tries to find out who Athos really is), but also because the narration refers to historical events far after the narrated time. In Chapter XLI it reads: “la prise de La Rochelle était la préface de la revocation de l’édit de Nantes.”^③ It is rather improbable that a person who was present at the siege of La Rochelle in 1628 (and not in the first flush of youth, either), could be alive to mention the revocation of 1685.^④

I suppose readers will accept *The Three Musketeers* as a traditional historical novel of adventures, and its introduction about the finding of the old manuscript as a means of make – believe, which is not really professional or convincing. Alternatively, such an introduction could be easily interpreted as too transparently cheating, which is therefore a sign of fictionality, deconstructing the whole apparatus of make – believe: a typical feature of post – modern historical metafiction (cf. Hutcheon 1988). There is, however, a third option too: taking the introduction’s story literally and reading the main body of the novel as told by Athos. And the fun

begins. Instead of a supposedly traditional, more or less omniscient narrator, we are given a shamelessly boasting one that is continuously playing with the focalization. Let us take the example of some passages from Chapter XXVII.

Comment allait – il retrouver Athos, et même le retrouverait – il?

La position dans laquelle il l'avait laissé était critique; il pouvait bien avoir succombé. Cette idée, en assombrissant son front, lui arracha quelques soupirs et lui fit formuler tout bas quelques serments de vengeance. De tous ses amis, Athos était le plus âgé, et partant le moins rapproché en apparence de ses goûts et de ses sympathies.

Pendant il avait pour ce gentilhomme une préférence marquée. L'air noble et distingué d'Athos, ces éclairs de grandeur qui jaillissaient de temps en temps de l'ombre où il se tenait volontairement enfermé, cette inaltérable égalité d'humeur qui en faisait le plus facile compagnon de la terre, cette gaieté forcée et mordante, cette bravoure qu'on eût appelée aveugle si elle n'eût été le résultat du plus rare sang – froid, tant de qualités attiraient plus que l'estime, plus que l'amitié de d'Artagnan, elles attiraient son admiration.^⑤

Supposing it is Athos who describes D'Artagnan's thoughts and feelings about Athos, when D'Artagnan fears that his friend has died, makes the suspense rather funny, even if a reader (at first reading) does not know at this point of the story that Athos is identical with the narrating Count de la Fère. And this narrating subject speaks about his nobility, distinguished air, intellectual greatness,^⑥ moreover he calls himself "the most pleasant companion in the world" – or at least he says these are the terms in which D'Artagnan thought of him. A little bit later he even calls himself (in D'Artagnan's mind) a beautiful creature, a fine essence, and a demigod.^⑦ In his thoughts, D'Artagnan does a sort of investigation, trying to find out what is Athos' secret.

Pour le présent, il n'avait pas de chagrin, il haussait les épaules quand on lui parlait de l'avenir; son secret était donc dans le passé, comme on l'avait dit vaguement à d'Artagnan.^⑧

Of course there is a secret in Athos' past, but the narrative of how D'Artagnan achieves knowledge of it seems to have a comic trait if it is told by Athos himself, the holder of the looked for information, who seems boasting to make himself more interesting by keeping the secret for a while. The whole narration becomes playful if we accept that it is narrated by Athos, not only when Athos is described or mentioned from an outer viewpoint, but also when events are narrated that Athos did not witness.

The "author" of the "Introduction" said he modified only the title of the work, but every chapter has a title of its own. Chapter XXVII is called "La femme d'Athos" (Athos' wife), which also seems strange if the title has been given by Athos himself. In the memoirs of Athos titles like follows would fit more properly: "My wife," or "How D'Artagnan convinced me to tell him about my wife, whom I failed to mention in the previous parts of my memoirs," or "D'Artagnan was really curious about the secret of my life, which was my wife." The result of an investigation is prematurely indicated by the investigated subject, although the story will focus on him from the external viewpoint of an investigator. The same dilemma again: either the author of the introduction lied (or did not tell the whole truth when he said he renamed the narrative and added subtitles) or many of the chapter titles indicate funny focalizing games.

The creation of a narrative frame and a second grade narrator, however, does not break up linearity, but there are other features that maybe do, such as parallel story lines (the doings of Lady Winter in England

while the protagonists are near La Rochelle), and long flashbacks (the previous stories of Athos, Aramis and Milady Winter), which make the big story patchwork of many small stories. Even the most traditional stories are supposed to work with a scene – summary rhythm, which does not challenge linearity in itself. In *The Three Musketeers*, however, there are longer story – blocks of relatively short time – span (narrated in a scene – summary rhythm too) connected through shorter summaries of long time – span. This can be interpreted as a linear narrative that focuses on a couple of main events with a rather general design of the narrative background. From the viewpoint of experience of fragmentary post – modern narratives, however, it can also be regarded as a basically fragmentary narration of only a couple of hardly related events loosely connected by some summaries of pretence. In this case the otherness of post – modern narratives is nothing else but saying good-bye to the superfluous pretence of connective summaries.

The flashbacks on the previous life – histories of the characters are not always coherent. Let us compare three statements about the age of Constance and the length of her marriage.

a) In Chapter VIII M. Bonacieux says he got married three years earlier (“On me l’ a fait épouser voilà bientôt trois ans”);^⑨

b) in Chapter X, when the narrator describes what D’ Artagnan sees having Mme Bonacieux before his eyes, it is stated that she is 25 – 26 years old (“C’ était une charmante femme de vingt – cinq’ à vingt – six ans”).^⑩

c) In a paragraph of Chapter XVII Mme Bonacieux is said to have been married when she was 18 (“Mariée dix – huit ans”) and to be 23 years old at the moment.^⑪

Statement c) challenges both a) and b), since she is either 25 – 26 or 23 years old — b) vs. c) — and her marriage has endured either 3 or 5 years — a) vs. c). And we can add: she married in her age either of 22 or 18 — [a) + b)] vs. c). There is, of course, no need to question the identity of the character, and possibly we can find some complicated solution for the contradictions. Since statement c) is the narrator’s declaration in Chapter XVII, we can take it as the “truth” and suppose that Bonacieux is too senile to remember when he got married or that he lied for whatever reason. If statement b) is regarded as free indirect discourse, it will describe D’ Artagnan’s visual experience rather than Mme Bonacieux herself, which may offer us some opportunities to harmonize b) with c). It would suggest either that the young man is not able to guess the woman’s age or that Mme Bonacieux looks 2 – 3 years older than she is. (This hypothesis of the representation of a character’s visual experience seems problematic, since her description contains details about her hands and feet, which D’ Artagnan is explicitly said not to have noticed.) It is more probable, however, that the coherence of the grand – scale narrative is not so important as the elaboration in the context of a given scene. The needs of a given situation influence the flashbacks, which may destabilize the reader’s knowledge of the characters. It challenges linearity, but does not prevent one from enjoying the novel.

Eco’s contrast between *Ulysses* and *The Three Musketeers* suggest that simple, linear narratives should be looked for in popular fiction. A look at a book by a Hungarian author who used to be the most popular of popular writers will shed light on this hypothesis. Jenő Rejtő (1905 – 1943) published many humorous adventure novels in the 1930s by the pseudo – name P. Howard. The description of the genre is a bit misleading, since the adventure novel was for him usually hardly more than a vehicle for a highly sophisticated, often absurd humour. One might therefore expect these narratives to be genuinely linear. My example is entitled *The Three Musketeers in Africa*, which is a story using the French Foreign Legion as a setting, and Dumas’ novel as an important intertext. The first chapter contains four subchapters, with a third person narrative of an escape from

the Legion. In subchapter 1 three soldiers are planning the escape in a fortress canteen. Subchapter 2 narrates the hunt for them from the viewpoint of those who did not escape, which ends in the massacre of the pursuers of one of the fugitives, called Pittman, by an Arab tribe. Pittman helped the Arabs to trap his fellow – soldiers and seize their weapons. Subchapter 3 narrates how Pittman was accompanied by a small Arab troop to the next oasis. Subchapter 4 is a dialogue between Pittman and a railway officer about the possibilities of travelling forward by train. The parts of the story are hardly more connected in the novel than in my short summary.

Chapter 1, however, ends with a meta – narrative commentary: “Five years passed after the narrated events, and concerning the continuation we have at our disposal the result of the literary activity of legionary John Fowler.” The rest of the novel is a first person narrative, in which John Fowler and his two friends go through various adventures. For a long while no connection can be seen between the Pittman storyline and the John Fowler narrative. But when the three friends generously offer to help a young woman (and it is therefore that they become similar to the three musketeers, apart from their great fighting skills) and they try to find her lost brother, they finally learn what has happened to Pittman and the other two fugitives in the five – year gap in the narrative. So we have two stories with different settings, time, characters and narrative points of view, which become related only in a later phase of the narration. A kind of continuity is more or less established at the end (at least at the level of the narrated events), but it is rather similar to a whodunit: the continuous second story is created as the result of the story of investigation.

A whodunit is usually described as a composite of two stories (Todorov 1977, 44). One of them, the story of investigation, is a linear narrative, but the other one, that of the crime, remains a cloud of fragmentary information (and of many seemingly unrelated mini – narratives about the past), until the detective’s mind solves the puzzle and arranges everything to reconstruct the linear story of the crime. One of the reasons why post – modernism uses the detective story as a master pattern (Holquist 1971, 135) may be the underlying belief, which can be happily deconstructed, that reason is able to finally stabilize an order both in the ethical and the narrative – epistemological dimensions. The detective appears as a master – reader of fragmentary narratives: the only one who is able to interpret diffused information into a linear narrative. In the adventure story I referred to above, the protagonists do not need special intellectual capacities for the investigation; their job is to find the persons who had already carried out the investigation in inaccessible places and to interview them. Todorov would call it a thriller (Todorov 1977, 47), but it does not change the impression that the second story is not really narrated in a linear way.

One might suppose that literature has lately got even rid of the illusion of a possible coherence that can be created as the result of a careful reading of not genuinely linear narratives. I would like to check this hypothesis through the counterexamples of two highly sophisticated narratives, which can be described, I think, as both fragmentary and post – colonial. This categorization seems self – evident in the case of Salman Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), but it may need some arguments for *Medea and Her Children* by Ludmila Ulitskaya, published originally in 1997. I regard them as counterexamples, but it must be admitted that the author of the latter is usually regarded in her own country as an easy bestseller – writer, while her early work has earned international renown for high quality analyses of the decomposition of an imperial consciousness. Therefore it is, on the one hand, a sophisticated post – modern piece of literature, on the other hand, still very close to the popular literature where linear narratives are supposed to be found. *Shalimar the Clown* may be a similar case; highly artistic prose, which, however, “at times [...] reads as something close to reheated journalism” (Cowley 2005),^② a genre which theoretically also can be rather linear.

Rushdie’s novel contains five chapters, each named after one of the protagonists: India, Boonyi, Max, Shalimar the Clown, and Kashmira. There are only four protagonists, but one of them, India changes her

name to Kashmira at one point in the story, which may be interpreted as the expression of a shift in personality. The individual chapters do not only stage different persons as main focalizing agents, they also tell more or less different stories, with their own settings and times. The frequent shifts in time, place, and focus give the narrative a fragmentary character, but it is not hard to read it as a continuous story. Since the plot of the chapter “Kashmira” is a continuation of that of the chapter “India”, and they bracket chapters describing previous events, the inner chapters can be regarded as flashbacks. Jason Cowley provides a short summary of the whole plot, commenting that: “All of this is told in elaborate flashback.” (Cowley, *ibid.*) Despite the sophisticated elaboration, a simple, linear family story of jealousy and revenge can be easily seen. It starts with the story of the father in Alsace of the 1940s, who later became the American ambassador to India, where a woman from Kashmir, called Boonyi, gave birth to a child by him. Boonyi’s husband, Shalimar, takes revenge, killing both Boonyi and Max, and wants to kill their daughter India/Kashmira too. The narrated time spans between 1940 and some time after 2000, with various events happening in India, France, England, California, Pakistan, Philippines, and some other places.

This varied kaleidoscope of events that happen over a time – span of more than half a century and in various places around the globe does not result in a fragmentary experience; it rather suggests that everything is connected. Characters separated for longer periods may feel connected in mysterious ways, and one can take it for sure that finally they will meet to finish their suspended story. The family story with a strong determinism on the layer of magical realism is one of the features that support the construction of an after all linear narrative. Another important feature is the political significance, which seems to guarantee a unified meaning. A critic of Rushdie’s spoke of “the grand symbolism of the act,” which makes it possible for her to summarize the story, again, as completely linear: “the resentful Muslim, in revenge for what he sees as the corruption wreaked by the west, is being used by greater political forces to try to cut down the American Jew” (Walter, 2005). If the allegory is so simple, the book appears to be almost journalism, to be sure. The story, however, may have a more general significance, emphasised, for example, by the continuously present subtext of the Trojan war, a mythical world – war caused by adultery.

Ulitskaya’s novel similarly presents an ethnic kaleidoscope in a huge span of time and space (mostly within the Soviet – Russian world), and that is why it can be called post – colonial. Only a few of the characters are of Russian ethnicity; we can say the novel narrates the 20th century history of a family that incorporates Greek, Georgian, Jewish, Korean, and many other elements. Although Crimea and Moscow are the most important settings (actually the only settings at the first narrative level) the main characters travel to many places, from Kishinev to Tashkent, and they have constant knowledge of an even bigger geographical continuum lived by the family from Vilnius to Tbilisi, from the Balkans to the Far East. And even if the reference to the reality of the empire is not central in the novel, it is constantly present and creates a background or a subtext. What is it that creates the impression of fragmentariness in this family novel? More than the first two thirds of the text narrate one week of holiday on the first narrative level. Random members of the huge family appear in Medea’s house in Crimea to spend some days by the sea and meet their relatives. They do not do really interesting things: they go to the cemetery or the beach, have little evening chats with drinks, or have sex. Such events, however, make up only a small proportion of the text, which is filled with long flashbacks. Any object, any new person or any event can stimulate a longer narrative from the family’s past. The third person narrator seems rather omniscient, easily entering the characters’ mind and surfing freely in time and space. The flashbacks are thus initiated by arbitrary associations. And the represented family is big enough to make the inserted narratives about different characters in different places and times create a fragmentary text.

Ultimately, we are given a family novel with the story of three generations. The linearity of the narration

is broken up, but actually few gaps remain on the narrated level. After a while the flashbacks will cover the whole past. The family experiences ethnic diversity and spatial dispersion, which is not independent from the imperial reality; but Medea's house as the centre of gravity of the family suggests a solid connectedness, just as Medea's personality guarantees the validity of some moral rules and that events can be understood, even if that may be through a special female logic with syncretic religious elements. The reader is provided with everything to see a coherent, linear narrative despite all the fragmentariness. One can enjoy this intellectual challenge, which perhaps needs a second reading, but the suggestion that a coherent story can be put together is clearly implied. And at the end an epilogue adds the final twist. A new, first person narrator appears there, a definitely female one, declaring that Medea's family is actually the family of her husband. Turning the omniscient narration into a personal experience seems to withdraw the obvious fictionality (of course, it cannot do so in reality) and to legitimise the fragmentary narration by showing it as the product of a personal mind. The last paragraph offers a kind of interpretation, since the narrator expresses her happiness in being a member of this huge family, and suggests that this surprisingly pleasant feeling stems from the fact that through the family she can experience a global, post-colonial reality.

Ulitskaya's epilogue creates something similar to Dumas' prologue; it tells us where the information comes from and creates a narrative frame. On the one hand, it is very important that it is put at the end. Dumas seems to say at the beginning that his is a documentary story, and a reader might have the option to accept this fiction of the documentary, though a careful reader must realise the non-documentary character sooner or later, if not immediately. Ulitskaya seems to offer a fictional story and to tell us at the end that it is not fiction but rather our reality; which readers can accept, or just regard as a meta-narrative statement about the applicative element of interpretation (cf. Gadamer 1990, 312 - 45). On the other hand, this decisive difference can be regarded as purely technical. Which leads to the whole question of fragmentariness. I have tried to show that really linear narratives have never existed and even the highly artistic fractured narratives of contemporary literature can be read as linear. The quantitative difference can be that of narrative technique, which, however, might express or create a deeply different experience.

注释[Notes]

① Since the text is quoted in various versions in the Anglophone scholarship, it can be useful to quote the official German translation: Es ist natürlich, dass das Leben mehr dem Ulysses als den Drei Musketieren gleicht; dennoch sind wir alle eher geneigt, es in den Kategorien der Drei Musketiere zu denken als in den des Ulysses; oder besser, ich kann das Leben nur erinnern und beurteilen, wenn ich es als traditionellen Roman denke.

② "Memoirs of the Comte de la Fere, Touching Some Events Which Passed in France Toward the End of the Reign of King Louis XIII and the Commencement of the Reign of King Louis XIV." I quote the English translation of the Project Gutenberg http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=2397088.

③ "[...] the taking of La Rochelle was the preface to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes."

④ The problem may be solved by supposing that the author did not actually mean the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, but the withdrawal of the so-called brevets (two final parts), which happened in 1629. Confusing historical data or a not really appropriate formalisation is not an unforgivable mistake in fiction. With this hypothesis, however, we do not interpret the actual text of the novel, but we create a new text and start interpreting that one. We can get rid of a contradiction, but it also means that through creating our own story we avoid facing a strong textual signal suggesting that something is wrong with the fictional frame.

⑤ "How was he going to find Athos? Should he find him at all?"

The position in which he had left him was critical. He probably had succumbed. This idea, while darkening his brow, drew several sighs from him, and caused him to formulate to himself a few vows of vengeance. Of all his friends, Athos was the eldest,

and the least resembling him in appearance, in his tastes and sympathies.

Yet he entertained a marked preference for this gentleman. The noble and distinguished air of Athos, those flashes of greatness which from time to time broke out from the shade in which he voluntarily kept himself, that unalterable equality of temper which made him the most pleasant companion in the world, that forced and cynical gaiety, that bravery which might have been termed blind if it had not been the result of the rarest coolness – such qualities attracted more than the esteem, more than the friendship of D'Artagnan; they attracted his admiration.”

⑥“[...]cette nature si distinguée, cette créature si belle, cette essence si fine[...]”.

⑦Alors, le demi – dieu évanoui, il restait à peine un homme. “Then the demigod vanished; he remained scarcely a man.”

⑧“For the present he had no anxiety. He shrugged his shoulders when people spoke of the feature. His secret, then, was in the past, as had often been vaguely said to D'Artagnan. This mysterious shade, spread over his whole person, rendered still more interesting the man.”

⑨“I was induced to marry her about three years ago.”

⑩“D'Artagnan examined her with a rapid glance. She was a charming woman of twenty – five or twenty – six years, with dark hair, blue eyes, and a nose slightly turned up, admirable teeth, and a complexion marbled with rose and opal. There, however, ended the signs which might have confounded her with a lady of rank. The hands were white, but without delicacy; the feet did not bespeak the woman of quality. Happily, D'Artagnan was not yet acquainted with such niceties.”

⑪“Married at eighteen to Monsieur Bonacieux [...] There was certainly enough in all this to turn a head only twenty – three years old, and Mme. Bonacieux had just attained that happy period of life.”

⑫Cowley refers to the story of Max' wartime experience, but reheated journalism rather disrupts the novelistic frame when a new and sort of alien voice starts to ask rhetoric questions about India's responsibility of anti – pandit pogroms in Kashmir (Rushdie 2005, 296 – 97).

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